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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of art in the education of young children, particularly in Australia. The first section reviews H. Gardner's theory (1983) that children need to be provided with opportunities to develop multiple forms of intelligence, one of which is intelligence relating to art. The value of play in children's education as put forward by various researchers, notably E. W. Eisner (1990) is also stressed. The second section of the paper examines the role of cultural activities in a society. It is maintained that children's art-making activities, and their learning about aesthetic values, are parts of the process of becoming educated. It is also emphasized that Australian citizens are to have a well-balanced view of their cultural heritage, Australian education must give a major place to Aboriginal art. The third section discusses theories, especially those of Vygotsky, that support a pedagogy based on play. The fourth section studies the educational context of children's artistic activity. Also considered are researchers' ideas about the connection between visual imagery, imagination, and education, and about the ability of raw sensory experience to stimulate the imagination of children. A 20-item bibliography is provided. (BC)

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ARTS EDUCATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Multiple Forms of Intelligence

In terms of written history Australia is still a young country in search of its identity and place in the world. Our proximity to the Pacific rim marks us as a part of South East Asia yet our population has strong ties to Europe through patterns of migration. We were used to thinking of ourselves as inheritors of the 'lucky country'. Yet in recent times the economic realities have caused us to redefine our priorities. There is talk about 'investing in people' and ideas instead of depending on our abundant natural resources which come out of the ground. The environmental debate has entered the argument. There has been a redefinition of the place of education in our present society and in the approach towards the end of the century has brought about a mood of introspection and reflection into the projections about the conditions of life for our children in the 21st century.

Such concerns are of great interest to families as well as governments. In a recent issue of the journal 'Family Matters' Don Edgar wrote in support of the alternative theory of Economic Humanism. He said '... investment in human capital, capacities to cope individually and collectively with our varied environments would become the core language of discourse, not investment in new enterprises or property' as exports as such. They are means not ends. (p2 1992) The author went on to present the new idea of 'Investment in Early Childhood' as one of the potential policy issues for a decade of 'economic humanism'. (op cit). Edgar brought forward his argument for such an investment policy in terms of a restatement of the significance of attending to the needs of children from the earliest years of life. Edgar quoted Gardner (1983) who said 'that the first eight years of life are the years of greatest cognitive growth and the development of multiple intelligences'. This acknowledgement that human intelligence has many facets which are responsive to experience is of considerable significance because it has curriculum implications for meeting the needs of young children who are involved in early childhood programs. Today many young children are in group programs for several years before they go to school and the curriculum and quality of such programs has been the focus of considerable professional interest. Gardner's theory that children have the need to be provided with the circumstances for the development of all of their capabilities for multiple forms of intelligence poses educational questions for program developers.
The community wants their children to be equipped in mathematics, sciences and technology, to cope with the perceived demands of the workforce, yet Gardner urges that children need to have all of their potential ranges of intelligence developed, as well as the technologies.

Research quoted by Edgar (op cit) and other theorists support the view that provision of high quality in programs for young children would indeed be an investment by the whole community in human capital. Whereas Gardner (1983) supported the view that art was one of the forms of intelligence that children need the opportunity to develop, more recently Fromberg (1990) made a strong case for the value of play. She stated 'when we consider a world in which global technology, economy and communication undergo rapid change, however, the most productive individuals will be those who are capable of collaborative work, connection making, and setting and solving problems in unique ways. Children acquire aspects of these important personal and social attributes through experiences and learnings generated in 'spontaneous social and pretend play' (p 228).

Traditionally play has been the basic pedagogical method upon which early childhood programs have been based although Bruner and others have shown that not all play is equally valuable from an educational perspective.

In recent years play has been the subject of intense study, empirical research, evaluation and theoretical scrutiny that are outside the scope of this paper. Play is still the basic pedagogical method that is used in programs for young children. As Eisner said (1990 p 43) 'Both art and play, like imagination and fantasy, are not regarded as a part of the serious business of schooling'. Yet he demonstrates strongly the links between different forms of children's play and the child's cognitive development. Although children are born ready for many kinds of experience they do not necessarily have the opportunities to 'make sense' of what lies about them. 'The qualities of the world are not, however simply given; they must be construed. Although the infant comes into the world "well wired" and capable of differentiating many qualities in each sensory modality, the relationships among qualities that are often subtle and complex are not automatically given to the infant' (1990 p 45). It is by means of the process of play that Eisner sees children as making sense. He said 'sense-making requires an active organism; knowing is a verb and always in a state of flux. Play is children's primary means of engaging the world, ...' (op cit).

Eisner's explanation spells out the connecting process whereby children who have the chances to develop the various modes of representation that are available to them are also developing multiple intelligences.

A Window on Ourselves

One of the expressed purposes for education is that within it lies our collective responsibility to introduce children to the symbol systems of our culture and provide them with the opportunities to use them. McLeod said recently in a book called 'The Arts and the Year 2000' that 'arguing from a broad cultural base, the major purpose of schooling is to introduce all students to the symbol systems of our culture and to develop a facility with their use. In this sense the curriculum is both comprehensive and common. Given access and experience all students can then participate in the life of our society. Shared culture has the effect of drawing people closer together. The spaces between individuals can be filled with meaning because the symbols are public and communicable. In this way, culture mediates between personal meaning and social structure' (p 6, 1991).

Whereas Gardner spoke of there being more than one kind of intelligence to be developed in children, others have spoken of the arts in terms of 'ways of knowing'. The logic of these redefinitions lead to the conclusion that if the arts provide 'access to the major ways of knowing and understanding experience which our culture has developed, then the arts must be part of the curriculum' (op cit p6).

In this section we develop the theme of the close link between a society and its cultural activities. It is people who make culture which they share through their productions. The collected treasures of our homes, our families, churches and of our town or states are there for younger generations to imbibe as a part of their cultural inheritance. Recognising ones home culture in a multicultural country is a reassuring symbol of our identity for us all.

Arts education for young children is not only about early explorations in making art important though this sensory experience is. In their art making activities children can experience with their hands some of the processes that are involved when an artist makes a piece of art. Without some participation in these processes children may remain unresponsive to art and their potential faculties remain latent. It is not a question of who is going to be a professional artist, but rather a matter of bringing out the artist in all of us. Appreciation and connoisseurship in seeing and discussing the work of other artists is also an essential part of a curriculum for educated individuals. We all need to be aroused to the possibilities of a medium or genre before understanding can develop. It is only through gradual and repeated exposure to visual ideas and visual objects that the verbal and artistic vocabulary can develop. We probably all can recall some instances where we gradually came to like a piece of music, or the work of certain artists to which we had not responded at first sight or hearing. The rewards for our efforts are the gradual development of a connoisseurship. Eisner (1991, 63) said of educational connoisseurship 'The ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities is an instance of what I have called connoisseurship. Connoisseurship is the art of appreciation. It can be displayed in any realm in which the characters, impact, or value of objects, situations and performances is distributed and variable, including educational practice' (1991, 63).

Arousal of aesthetic values is a general part of our learning to be an educated person. Wide awakeness was the metaphor used by the philosopher Maxine Greene as 'an argument for the arts and humanities in education' (1978. 161). In writing of this attribute Greene quotes Alfred Schutz. He said that '... human beings define themselves by means of their projects and that wide-awakeness contributes to the creation of the self. If it is indeed the case, as I believe it is, that involvement with the arts and humanities has the potential for provoking precisely this sort of reflectiveness, we need to devise ways of integrating them into what we teach at all levels of the educational enterprise ..' (op cit 163). Greene encouraged educators themselves to be actively self-reflective, to remain in touch with their own personal experiences and keep in touch with the formative influences of their life history. She concluded that 'attentiveness to one's own history, ones own self-formation, may open one up to critical awareness of much that has been taken for granted' (op cit 103).

In the Australian context we are only learning to be attentive to our own history and our particular place in the globe. It was writer Donald Horne who has only this year drawn our attention to the place of museums as 'a window on ourselves' (1992 January). For a country that considered its cultural traditions to be quite recent and derived from the old world we seemed bereft of the centuries of culture such as those that are in Asian and European civilisations.

As the voice of our national conscience Horne says to us 'Museums are one of the ways that we can become a more clever, imaginative and wiser country ... in the sense that ... museums can encourage us to look at things that are part of our ..... social and cultural environment and a part of our natural environment, and we can think about what Australia is' (op cit). It is significant to note that while the country is in the grip of an economic recession it has been reported that our local museums have experienced the highest attendance rates for many years. The report concluded that 'people turned to museums in times of trouble to put their problems into perspective' (Messenger Press, January 22 1992).

For Australians to have a well balanced view of our cultural heritage it must reallocate a major place for Aboriginal art. Currently contemporary

Aboriginal art is enjoying a new found international popularity and Australians are coming to recognise the unique cultural contributions of the first Australians. It is significant that recently there has been a new discovery of rock paintings of great antiquity in the Kimberley region in Western Australia. The newly discovered examples are also the largest known rock paintings in the world. It is now known that rock paintings have been made by Aboriginal artists continuously from 32,000 years ago 'making it ..... the oldest continuing cultural tradition' (*The Australian* newspaper 23.1.92). While such new discoveries are usually in very unaccessible parts of the continent few people can see them and viewing them will not be as easy as visiting an art museum. Yet the very presence of the rock painting marks a watershed in the recognition of the art of the Australian Aboriginal people that must leave an indelible mark upon our combined cultural perceptions. Indeed the discovery is of global importance.

In the next section we move back from the social domain of arts awareness and look again at the theoretical propositions supporting a pedagogy based on play.

Personal Ways of Knowing

One of the major influences on the study of play has evolved from the cultural anthropological orientation represented by Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky introduced the idea that play operates in advance of development in this theory called at the Zone of Proximal development. In play it is said children use objects as a pivot to symbolise situations eg using a block of wood to be an aeroplane. From objects as a pivot other theorists have taken an interest in the nature of the childs subjective experiencing in play of the 'flow' momentum which transcends time and place. These recent theoretical explanations with their orientation towards the future dimensions of play seem to reflect some of the conditions of the phenomenom of wide awakeness as described by Schutz (Greene, p 163).

'By the term "wide-awakeness" we want to denote a place of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. Only the performing and especially the working self is highly interested in life and, hence, wide awake. It lives within its acts and its attention is exclusively directed to carrying its project into effect, to executing its plan. The attention is an active, not a passive one. Passive attention is the opposite to full awareness' in Greene (1978, 163).

It is necessary to reflect about ways in which these hidden qualities of experience can be linked with a meaningful program in which children can associate their playful experiences with personal discovery. The most fundamental beginnings arise from the simple experiences a baby has of the textures of water and sand and earth and the sensory explorations with mouth, and hands and feet. Children who play outdoors are surrounded by a natural and a man made environment that is full of sounds and scents, and colours and textures. For example, in the Australian family gathered around the camp fire on their summer holiday the baby is an integral part of the social group viewing the sights and sounds of the evening from the safe vantage point of a choice of adult laps. Here is the raw material of personal discovery. While early in childhood children are dependent on adults for their experiences, later in childhood the collecting instinct becomes a reality and children themselves will choose to explore and collect man made or natural materials that are available. There are endless possibilities. These may be sea shells, tickets, seed pods, stamps, or even fossil shells or gem stone pebbles.

This natural propensity of children to collect has been seen to have a fresh significance. Szekely (1991) has shown how this developmental phase goes beyond collections of bus tickets and stickers. In his paper entitled 'Discovery, experiences in art history for young children' the author makes the links between the cultural objects of children's collecting interests and personal knowledge.

'Children's history interests include dinosaurs and fossils, as well as interests that surface through family histories preserved in old photo albums and scrapbooks.'

Szekely reminds us that not only are children interested in collecting old 'stuff' but 'as collectors and players, they become interested in the history of their own things, their finds – the history of dolls, teddy bears, marbles, or jack-in-the-boxes' (op cit p43).

In these ways children are discovering personal meaning in objects, and by bringing them into a classroom and linking history with the work of artists and writers they begin to see the wider implications. As Szekely said 'Art history learning often begins at home, ...'. Later he said 'children need to be involved in the search for (and) memorable discoveries looking at familiar objects, but with new visions and ideas' (1991, p44).

Although such experiences have not always been classified as art history as compared with the curriculum area of social studies historical themes have been successfully developed with 4 year old children in country communities. When teachers themselves are interested in heritage material antique domestic objects can be loaned from the community and brought into the centre. Children can engage in socio-dramatic play with objects that their great grandparents would have used. They can experience soap making, and candle making in the old fashioned way.

This is one simple example of a type of curriculum project that helps children to be in touch with their own local and family history in an authentic way. Each child and person needs to find their own ways to personal meaning, and in such projects there are multiple openings for expression to suit different needs. Every child has the chance to build a repertoire of experiences which can be the basis for expression by their preferred choice of symbolic systems. The same outward experiences will be expressed in different ways with the means that children have available to them, in a mode that is personally salient, and culturally relevant.

The Context for Artistic Activity

Philosopher Maxine Greene quotes Merleau Ponty who said that 'what defines the human being is not the capacity to create a second nature ..... it is rather the capacity to go beyond created structures in order to create others' (1978, 103). When educating children for the 21st century this may be the futures vision that we aspire to. Greene suggested some answers for educators. 'Attentiveness to ones own history, one's own self-formation, may open up critical awareness of much that is taken for granted' (op cit 103). She suggested that we need to be able to interpret what is happening and to accept 'human actions viewed as texts' (op cit). Sebba (1991, p395) considered the landscapes of childhood as reflected in adults' memories. She said recently 'The spaces and views that surround us when we are children become, in the

course of time, inner landscapes that we incorporate into our childhood memories'. These links between the present and our own history may lie beneath the level of our day to day consciousness unless some event triggers the recollection.

The connection between visual imagery, imagination and education has been explored by Nadaner. He says 'art remains the homeground of the visual imagination, providing a concrete form through which to observe the workings of the imagination' (1988, 202, 3). Yet we need to remember the place that imagery also plays in the sciences, mathematics, in poetry and reading. The pool of images and the scope of our imagination has to be nourished by life experience and by contact with the imaginative productions of other artists. One of the cultural icons of Australian myth has been the legend of the bushranger Ned Kelly perpetuated through the artistic perception and imagination of Australian artist Sidney Nolan. The artist's images far transcend the reality of a petty criminal transmuting the myth into a powerful cultural symbol.

Eisner speaks of the need to feed the imagination. He said 'imagination is fed by perception and perception by sensibility and sensibility by artistic cultivation. With refined sensibility, the scope of perception is enlarged. With enlarged perception, the resources that feed our imaginative life are increased' (1991, 15). Curriculum for groups of young children needs to be built upon a foundation of raw sensory experience. The working and reworking and editing of these springboards of experience is a process in which children can engage their thinking and imagination. There are countless examples of Australian art where the source of imagery for artists was the landscape but whose imaginative transformation of that landscape may have been painted half a world away. McLeod (1991, p19) says 'initial engagement is tempered by imagination. Students have to transform raw experience through the processes of selection, crafting and forming and this requires them to go beyond the known and the actual. What might have happened becomes as important as what did happen'. Making meaning through art may be personal but it can also be through the process of shared social interaction that changes the direction of the event. There are many examples of famous collaborations in the fields of the arts from which children can take the lead.

In a recent development in arts education in Australia the art work of young children has been shown in formal exhibition spaces in the foyer of a theatre, and in the State Public Library. These examples seem to indicate a recognition of the value of child art which must add immeasurably to the stimulation and connoisseurship of the viewing child audience as well as the adults. In a recent curriculum document on 'The Arts and the Year 2000' Macleod said 'The context in which artistic activity and experience exists is not simply a passive backdrop against which activity occurs. Rather, the context in which the arts plays a much more important role. Context is an active transformer of experience. The context in which the arts occur gives form to artistic activity and makes that activity what it is. The arts are grounded in time and place and a specific cultural world view' (1991, p8).

Conclusion

If one accepts the sequence of arguments that investment in human capital is a valid goal for society and Gardners' view that children can develop multiple intelligences then new approaches to the curriculum would result. The kind of

learning approaches change if there is acceptance that there are many ways of knowing and that children have the right to share in all kinds of knowing. With familiarity can come a wide awakeness and a heightened self awareness that provides the nuances for connoisseurship. It is believed that these attributes can be fed and developed and nourished by imagination. The context in which these experiences take place is not the world of the never never land, but is socially constructed in a time and a place. The foundation for the 21st century lies in the present.

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